

CHAPTER 4

The Divine Law

¶1 The noun “law,” taken absolutely, signifies that in accordance with which each individual—whether all or some of the same species—acts by one and the same certain and determinate plan. It depends, in truth, either on the necessity of nature or on the willingness of human beings. A law that depends on the necessity of nature is one that follows necessarily from the very nature or definition of the thing. One that depends^o on the willingness of human beings, however, and which is more properly called right, is one that human beings prescribe for themselves and others for living more safely and more advantageously, or in view of other causes.

2 [2] For example, that all bodies when impinging on other, smaller ones, lose as much of their motion as they communicate to others, is a universal law of all bodies which {58} follows from the necessity of nature.

3 So too, that a human being when recalling one thing at once recalls another, similar thing, or one he had perceived at the same time as it, is a law that follows necessarily from human nature.

4 Yet that human beings yield or are compelled to yield their right that they have from nature, and restrict themselves to a certain plan of living, depends on human willingness.

5 [3] And although I will absolutely grant that everything is determined on the basis of universal laws of nature for existing and operating by a certain and determinate plan, I still say that these laws depend on the willingness of human beings.

6 First, since a human being, insofar as he is a part of nature, constitutes a part of the power of nature. What follows from the necessity of human nature, therefore—that is, from nature itself insofar as we conceive it as being determined through human nature—still follows, albeit necessarily, from human power; therefore, it can very well be said that the sanctioning of those laws depends on the willingness of human beings, since it depends chiefly on the power of the human mind, so that the human mind insofar as it perceives things under the pattern¹ of the true and the false can nevertheless be conceived very clearly without these laws, yet not without a necessary law as we have just defined it.

7 [4] Second, I have also said that these laws depend on the willingness of human beings since we have to define and explain things through their proximate causes; and the foregoing universal consideration concerning fate and the chaining together of causes can hardly serve us in forming and organizing our thoughts about particular

¹ Or perhaps: format. (Cf. 2.9.17.) See Glossary, s.v. “reason.”

things.

8 Add that we are plainly ignorant of that coordination and chaining together of things, that is, of how things are really ordered and chained together; and so, for the conduct of life, it is better—indeed, necessary—to consider things as open² possibilities.²

9 So much for law considered absolutely.

¶2 [5] Be that as it may, since the noun “law” seems applied to natural things by transference, and commonly nothing else is understood by law than a command that human beings can either fulfill or neglect—inasmuch as a law restricts human power within certain limits beyond which it extends, and does not command anything above its strength—therefore it seems that Law is to be defined more particularly: namely, it is a plan of living which a human being prescribes for himself or others in view of some aim.

2 [6] Still, since the true aim of the laws is usually obvious only to a few, {59} and mostly human beings are more or less incapable of perceiving it and live on the basis of anything but reason,³ therefore to restrict everyone equally, lawgivers have wisely established another aim, quite different from the one that follows necessarily from the nature of the laws: namely, by promising upholders⁴ of the laws what the vulgar love most, and on the other hand threatening those who violate them with what the vulgar fear most. And so they have endeavored to curb the vulgar as a horse by the rein, so far as it can be done. [7] Hence it has come about that a plan of living which is prescribed to human beings on the basis of an imperium of others is considered law in the greatest degree. And consequently, as those who comply with the laws are said to live under the law and are seen to be subservient, one who gives each his own because he fears imprisonment⁵ really acts having been compelled on the basis of another’s imperium and by an evil, and cannot be called just. Yet one who gives each his own on the basis of recognizing the true plan of the laws and their necessity acts in a steadfast spirit and on the basis of his own⁶ decree—not, in truth, some⁷ alien one—and so is deservedly called just. [8] I deem that Paul meant to teach this as well, when he said that those who lived under the law could not be justified through the law.⁷ For justice as is commonly defined is the steadfast and perpetual will to give each his right. And therefore Solomon says in Proverbs 21:15 that the Just one rejoices when Judgment is done, whereas the iniquitous tremble.

3 [9] Since Law is accordingly nothing else but a plan of living which human beings prescribe to themselves or others in view of some aim, therefore Law seems to be distinguished into the human and the divine. By a human one, I understand a plan of living which only serves to protect life and the republic. By a divine one, however, I understand⁸ one that has to do solely with the highest good, that is, with the true

² Lit.: as possible.

³ Or: a plan. The latter rendering occurs in 4.1.5 and twice later in 4.2.2, and in 4.2.3(twice), 5, 6(twice). Cf. Glossary, s.v. “reason.”

⁴ Lit.: defenders.

⁵ Lit.: a yoke (akin to modern handcuffs, or ball and chain).

⁶ Or: a proper.

⁷ See Rom. 3:20.

knowledge and love of God.

4 The reason why I call this law divine is on account of the nature of the highest good, which I will here show in a few words⁶ and as clearly as I can.

¶3 [10] Since the better part of ourselves is the understanding, it is certain that, if we really want to seek what is useful for ourselves, we have to endeavor above all to perfect our understanding as much as can be done. For our highest good has to consist in its perfection.

2 Further, since all our knowledge, and the certainty that really removes all doubt, depends solely on knowledge of God—both since without God nothing can be or be conceived, and since we can doubt {60} all things so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God—hence it follows that our highest good and perfection depends solely on knowledge of God, etc.

3 [11] Furthermore, since nothing can be or be conceived without God, it is certain that everything that is in nature involves and expresses the concept of God by reason of its essence and its perfection; and therefore, the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God which we acquire. Or (since knowledge of an effect through the cause is nothing else than knowing some property of the cause), the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God's essence (which is the cause of all natural things). [12] And so the whole of our knowledge, that is, our highest good, not only depends on knowledge of God, but consists of it altogether. This also follows from the fact that a human being is also more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing that he loves in preference to the rest, and vice versa. And so, one who loves above all the intellectual knowledge of God—no doubt the most perfect being—and delights in it most, is necessarily the most perfect, and participates most in the highest blessedness.

4 Our highest good and our blessedness accordingly goes back to this: knowledge and love of God.

5 [13] The means that this aim of all human actions requires—namely, God himself insofar as his idea is in us—can therefore be called God's biddings, since they are prescribed to us, as it were, by God himself insofar as he exists in our mind; and so the plan of living which has to do with this aim is best called the Divine law.

6 What these means are and what plan of living this aim requires, and how the foundations of the best republic and the plan of living among human beings follow from it, however, pertains to universal Ethics.⁸

7 Here I go on to deal with the divine law only in general.

¶4 [14] Since love of God is accordingly the highest happiness and blessedness and the ultimate aim of a human being and the goal of all human actions, it follows that one follows the divine law only by taking care to love God not on the basis of fear of a comeuppance or in preference to the love of some other thing, like pleasures, fame, etc., but solely on the basis of the fact that he recognizes God, or that he recognizes that the knowledge and love of God is the highest good.

2 [15] The sum of the divine law and its highest precept, therefore, is to love God as

⁶ Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Pt. III, Pref., with, e.g., Pt. I, Prop. 33, Pt. IV, Def. 8 and Prop. 37 (trans. White, 127-28, 68-71, 191, 214-17).

the {61} highest good, namely, as we have already said, not on the basis of dread of some comeuppance and punishment, nor in view of the love of some other thing in which we long to delight. For the idea of God dictates that God is our highest good, or that the knowledge and love of God is the ultimate aim toward which all our actions are to be directed.

3 [16] Yet a carnal human being is unable to understand these things; and they seem to him vain, since he has an extremely meager knowledge of God, and also since he finds nothing in this highest good which he might touch or eat or, finally, which might affect the flesh—in which he delights most—inasmuch as it consists solely in theorizing and purely in the mind.⁹

4 Yet those who recognize that they have nothing more outstanding than understanding and a sound mind will no doubt judge these things to be very solid.

5 [17] We have accordingly explained what the divine law mainly consists of; and we have explained what human laws are, namely, all those laws that aim at some other goal—unless they have been sanctioned by revelation. For things are referred to God by this consideration as well (as we have shown above);¹⁰ and in this sense the law of Moses, although it was not universal but was accommodated in the greatest degree to the mental cast and special preservation of one populace, can still be called the Law of God, or the divine Law, inasmuch as we believe it has been sanctioned by the Prophetic light.

6 [18] If we now pay attention to the Nature of the natural divine law as we have just explained it, we will see, first, that it is universal or common to all human beings. For we have deduced it from universal human nature. Second, it does not require a faith in histories,¹¹ whatever they may ultimately be; for since this natural divine Law is understood solely from the consideration of human nature, it is certain that we can conceive it in Adam equally as well as in any other human being—in a human being who lives among human beings, equally as well as in a human being who leads a solitary life.

7 [19] Nor can a faith in histories, however certain, give us knowledge of God, or consequently love of God as well. For love of God arises from knowledge of him. Knowledge of him, however, has to be drawn from common notions that are certain in themselves and self-evident,¹² so that it is far from necessary that a faith in histories is a prerequisite for us to arrive at our highest good.

8 Still, although a faith in histories is unable to give us knowledge and love of God, yet we do not deny that, for the reason of civil life, a reading of them is very useful. {62} For the more we observe—and the better we recognize—the mores¹³ and conditions of human beings, which cannot be recognized by anything better than by their actions, the more we will be able to live more cautiously among them and better accommodate our actions and life to their mental cast, as much as reason lets us^o.

⁹ Lit.: in the pure mind. Likewise at 4.4.27.

¹⁰ See 2.9.8-25.

¹¹ Or: stories. Likewise in 4.4.7f., 12.

¹² More or less lit.: certain and recognized through themselves.

¹³ Or: morals.

9 [20] We see, third, that this natural divine law does not require ceremonies, that is, actions that are indifferent in themselves and are called good solely by being instituted, or which represent some good necessary for salvation, or, if you prefer, actions whose reason surpasses human grasp. For the natural light requires nothing that that same light does not reach, but only what it can indicate very clearly to us as being good, or a means to our blessedness. What is good solely by commandment and by being instituted, or by being representations of some good, however, is unable to perfect our understanding and is nothing else but mere shadows and cannot be enumerated among the actions that are, as it were, the offspring or fruit of understanding and of a sound mind.

10 There is no need here to show this at more length.

11 [21] Fourth, finally, we see that the highest reward of the divine law is the law itself¹⁴—namely, knowing God and loving him out of true freedom and a full and steadfast spirit—the punishment being deprivation of these and slavery of the flesh, or an unsteady and vacillating spirit.

12 [22] With these things so noted, it is now to be inquired: First, can we, by the natural light, conceive God as a lawgiver or prince prescribing laws to human beings? Second, what does Sacred Scripture teach about this natural light and law? Third, to what end were the ceremonies once instituted? Finally, fourth, what is the relevance of knowing the sacred histories and believing in them?

13 I will deal with the first two in this Chapter, and the last two in the following one.¹⁵

14 [23] What is to be stated about the first is easily deduced from the nature of God's will, which is not distinguished from God's understanding except with respect to our reason. That is, God's will and God's understanding are in themselves really one and the same. Nor are they distinguished except with respect to our thoughts that we have formed of God's understanding.

15 [24] For example, when we pay attention to the fact that the nature of a triangle is contained in the divine nature from eternity as an eternal truth, we then say that God has the idea of a triangle, or understands the nature of a triangle. But when {63} we afterward pay attention to the fact that the nature of a triangle is thus contained in the divine nature solely out of the necessity of the divine nature, and not out of the necessity of the essence and nature of a triangle—indeed, that the necessity of the essence and properties of a triangle, insofar as they are conceived as eternal truths as well, depends solely on the necessity of the divine nature and understanding, and not on the nature of the triangle—then the same thing we have called God's understanding, we call God's will or decree.

16 [25] With respect to God, therefore, we affirm one and the same thing when we say that God has decreed and willed from eternity that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and that God has understood this same thing.

17 Hence it follows that God's affirmations and negations always involve eternal

¹⁴ Cf. Mishnah, *Avot* 4:2 (*Mishnayoth*, ed. and trans. P. Blackman [6 vols.; 2nd ed.; Gateshead, England: Judaica Press, 1977], IV, 516).

¹⁵ See, respectively, 4.4.14-31, 4.4.32-50, 5.1.1-3.10, and 5.3.11-4.24.

necessity or truth.

18 [26] Accordingly, if, for example, God said to Adam that he did not want Adam to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it would be a contradiction for Adam to be able to eat from that tree; and so it would be impossible for Adam to eat from it. For that divine decree had to involve eternal necessity and truth.

19 But yet, since Scripture narrates that God enjoined it on Adam and nevertheless Adam ate from the tree,¹⁶ it is necessarily to be said that God only revealed to Adam the evil that would necessarily follow for him if he ate from that tree, but not the necessary consequence of that evil. [27] Hence it came about that Adam did not perceive that revelation as an eternal and necessary truth, but as a law, that is, as something¹⁷ instituted; for the gain or loss follows not from the necessity and nature of the action of the perpetrator, but solely from the discretion and absolute imperium of some Prince.

20 Therefore, that revelation was a law—and God a lawgiver or Prince, as it were—solely with respect to Adam, and solely on account of the deficiency of his knowledge.

21 [28] And because of this as well, namely, in view of the deficiency of knowledge, the Decalogue was only a law with respect to the Hebrews. For since they did not recognize God's existence as an eternal truth, therefore what was revealed to them in the Decalogue—namely, that God exists and that God alone is to be prayed to—had to have been perceived as a law. For if God had spoken to them with no bodily means employed, but immediately, they would have perceived this same thing not as a law, but as an eternal truth.

22 [29] Yet what we are saying of the Israelites and Adam is to be said of all Prophets who {64} wrote laws in the name of God as well: viz., they did not perceive God's decrees adequately as eternal truths.

23 For example, it is also to be said of Moses himself that he perceived from revelation, or from the foundations revealed to him, the mode in which the Israelite populace could best be united in a certain area of the world and form a full society, or erect an imperium. Furthermore, he also perceived the mode in which that populace could best be compelled to obey; but he did not perceive, nor was it revealed to him, that that mode was the best, nor that the goal at which the laws aimed followed necessarily from the common obedience of the populace in such an area of the world.

24 [30] On that account, he did not perceive all these things as eternal truths, but as precepts and things instituted, and enjoined them as God's laws. And hence it came about that God was imagined as ruler, lawgiver, king, compassionate, just, etc., while yet all these things are attributes of human nature alone and are to be completely removed from the divine nature. And I say that this is to be said solely of the Prophets who wrote laws in God's name—not, however, of Christ. [31] For of Christ, although he seems to have written laws in God's name as well, still it is to be thought¹⁷ that he perceived things truly and adequately. For Christ was not so much a Prophet, as the

¹⁶ Gen. 2:16-17, 3:6.

¹⁷ Lit.: felt.

mouth of God.

25 For God revealed some things to the human race through the mind of Christ (as we have shown in Ch. 1)¹⁸ just as he had revealed things before through Angels—namely, through a created voice, visions, etc.

26 On that account, it would be equally alien to reason to state that God accommodated his revelations to the opinions of Christ, and that to communicate the matters to be revealed to the Prophets God accommodated his revelations beforehand to the opinions of angels, that is, of created voices and visions: nothing more absurd than this can be stated, especially since Christ was not sent to teach the Jews alone, but the whole human race; and so it was not enough for him to have a mind accommodated only to the opinions of the Jews, but to the opinions and lessons universal to the human race, that is, to notions that are common and true.

27 [32] And surely, from the fact that God revealed himself immediately to Christ or to his mind, and not through words and images, as he did to the Prophets, we cannot understand anything else but that Christ perceived or understood the revealed things truly. For a thing is understood when it is perceived purely by the mind, apart from the words and images. {65}

28 Christ, accordingly, perceived revealed matters truly and adequately. [33] If, therefore, he ever prescribed them as laws, he did so on account of the ignorance and stubbornness of the populace. In this matter, therefore, he played the role of God; for he accommodated himself to the mental cast of the populace; and therefore, although he spoke somewhat more clearly than the other Prophets, he still taught revealed matters obscurely, and very often through parables, especially since he spoke to those to whom it had not yet been given to understand the kingdom of heaven (see Mt. 13:10, etc.); [34] and, without a doubt, to those to whom it had been given to recognize the mysteries of heaven, he taught matters as eternal truths and did not prescribe them as laws; and for this reason, he freed them from the slavery of the law, and nevertheless confirmed and stabilized this law more and inscribed it inwardly on their hearts.

29 Paul seems to indicate this in certain passages as well, namely, in Romans 7:6 and 3:28.

30 [35] Still, he did not want to speak openly either; but as he says in 3:5 and 6:19 of the same Epistle, he speaks in a human manner, as he says expressly when he calls God just; and, without doubt, he also attaches compassion, grace, anger, etc., to God on account of the weakness of the flesh; and he accommodates his words to the mental cast of the plebs, or (as he says as well in I Cor. 3:1-2) of carnal human beings. [36] For in Romans 9:18, he teaches absolutely that God's anger and his mercy do not depend on human works, but solely on God's calling, that is, will. Furthermore, he teaches that no one becomes just by the works of the law, but solely by faith (see Rom. 3:28), by which surely he understands nothing other than the complete consent of the spirit; and, finally, he teaches that no one becomes blessed unless he has in him the mind of Christ (see Rom. 8:9), by which he perceives God's laws as eternal truths.

¹⁸ See 1.14.3-5.4.

31 [37] We accordingly conclude that God is not described as a lawgiver or prince and called just, compassionate, etc., except as befits the grasp of the vulgar, and solely from a deficiency of knowledge; and that God really acts and directs everything solely out of the necessity of his own nature and perfection; and, finally, that his decrees and volitions are eternal truths and always involve necessity—and that is what I had set out to explain and show in the first place.¹⁹

32 [38] Let us therefore go over to the second thing,²⁰ and run through the Sacred Page and see what it teaches about {66} the natural light and this divine law.

33 The first thing that occurs to us is the very history²¹ of the first human being, where it is narrated that God enjoined Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: this seems to signify that God enjoined Adam to do and seek the good for the reason of the good and not insofar as it is contrary to evil—that is, that he seek the good out of love of the good and not out of a fear of evil. For, as we have already shown,²² he who does the good out of true knowledge and love of the good acts freely and in a steadfast spirit, whereas he who acts out of a fear of evil is compelled by the evil and acts slavishly and lives under another's imperium; [39] and so this unique precept^o that God gave Adam comprehends the whole natural divine law and absolutely agrees with the dictate of the natural light, and it would not be difficult to explain the history or parable of the first human being from this foundation. But I prefer to dismiss it, both since I cannot be absolutely certain whether my explanation would agree with the mind of the writer, and since many do not grant that this history is a parable, but state plainly that it is a simple narrative.

34 [40] It will therefore be preferable to bring other passages of Scripture into evidence, especially those that are dictated by one who speaks by force of the natural light, in which he surpassed all the wise men of his age, and whose tenets the populace embraced as equally holy²³ as those of the Prophets. I deem it to be Solomon, whose Prophecy and piety are not commended in the sacred books^o so much as his prudence and wisdom are.

35 [41] In his Proverbs, he calls the human understanding the source of true life and sets²⁴ misfortune in foolishness alone.

36 For thus he says in 16:22, *מִקְור חַיִם שְׁכֵל בָּעַלְיוֹ וּמוֹסֵר אַוִילִים אֹוְלָת* *The source of life (is) the understanding of its owner's,²⁵ and the comeuppance of fools is foolishness.* Here it is to be noted that in Hebrew, by life absolutely,²⁶ true life is

¹⁹ See 4.4.12-13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Or: story.

²² Cf. 4.2.1-4.11.

²³ Lit.: equally holy.

²⁴ Lit.: constitutes. Likewise in 4.4.37.

²⁵ A Hebraism. One who has any thing or contains it in his nature is called the Owner of that thing; thus, a bird in Hebrew is called an Owner of wings, since it has wings. One who understands is an Owner of understanding, since he has understanding." Spinoza's note. "Owner" is capitalized in Spinoza's note, presumably for emphasis, although it is not capitalized in his rendering of the Hebrew citation in the text.

²⁶ I.e., grammatically, in the absolute (as opposed to the construct) case. Cf. Spinoza, *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*, Ch. 8, beginning. (*Opera*, I, 311f.; *Hebrew Grammar: A Concise Compendium*, trans. M.J.

understood, as is obvious from Deuteronomy 30:19.

37 He therefore sets the fruit of the understanding in true life alone, and the comeuppance in the deprivation of it alone: this absolutely agrees with what we have noted in the fourth place about the natural divine law.²⁷ Moreover, that this source of life, or the understanding alone, prescribes laws to the wise, as we have shown as well,²⁸ is openly taught by this same wise man. For he says {67} in 13:14, **תורת חכם מדור חיים** *The Law of the prudent (is) the source of life*, that is, as is obvious from the text just brought up, the understanding.

38 [42] Besides, in 3:13 he teaches in very express words that the understanding renders a human being blessed and happy, and gives true tranquility of spirit. For thus he says, **אשרי אדם מצא חכמה ובן אדם יפיק התבונה וגוי ארך ימים בימינה בשמאללה עשר וכבוד דרכיה דרכיו נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום** *Blessed is the human being who has discovered science, and the son of a human being who has extracted understanding. Blessed is the human being who has extracted understanding.* The reason is (as vss. 16-17 go on) that *it gives length of days²⁹ directly, riches and honor indirectly. Its ways (which, no doubt, science indicates) are charming, and all its paths are peace.*

39 On the basis of Solomon's tenet as well, therefore, the wise alone live with a pacified and steadfast spirit, not as the impious do, whose spirit vacillates with contrary emotions; and so (as Isaiah says too, in 57:20) they have neither peace nor rest.

40 [43] Finally, it is to be noted by us most in these Proverbs of Solomon that what is said in the second chapter is such as to confirm our opinion as clearly as possible. For thus he begins verse 3 of the same chapter **כִּי אִם לְבִינָה תִּקְרָא לִתְבּוֹנָה תִּתְן קָולֶךְ וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים תִּמְצָא כִּי יְהוָה יִתְן חִכָּמָה מִפְיוֹ דַעַת וְתִבּוֹנָה וְגַוְאָז תְּבִין יְרָאָת יְהוָה וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים תִּמְצָא כִּי יְהוָה יִתְן חִכָּמָה מִפְיוֹ דַעַת וְתִבּוֹנָה For if you will cry out for prudence and give your voice to understanding, etc., then you will understand the fear of God and you will discover the science (or, rather, love; for the verb *Yada* signifies these two things) of God. For (note well) God gives wisdom; science and prudence (emanate) from his mouth.**³⁰

41 [44] By these words he surely indicates very clearly, first, that wisdom or understanding alone teaches us to fear God wisely, that is, to worship by the true religion.

42 Furthermore, he teaches that wisdom and science flow from God's mouth and that God gives them: this we have shown above,³¹ namely, that our understanding and our science depend on, arise from, and are perfected solely by the idea of God.

43 [45] He furthermore goes on to teach in very express words, at verse 9, that this science contains the true Ethics and Politics, and that they are deduced from it: **אַז תִּבְין צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָט וּמִשְׁרָם כָּל מַעֲגָל טוֹב כִּי תִבּוֹא חִכָּמָה בְּלִבְךְ וְדַעַת לְנַפְשְׁךְ יִגְعַם מִזְמָה תִּשְׁמֹר עַלְיךָ תִּבּוֹנָה** *Then will you understand Justice and judgment and righteousness (and) every good path; and, not content with these things, he goes on,*

Bloom [New York: Philosophical Library, 1962], 39).

²⁷ See 4.4.11.

²⁸ Cf. 4.3.5-4.5.

²⁹ "A Hebraism signifying nothing else but life." Spinoza's note.

³⁰ Prov. 2:3, 5.

³¹ Cf. 4.3.2-5.

תִּנְצַרְכָּה When science enters {68} into your heart and wisdom is sweet to you, then your providence³² will watch over you, and prudence will guard you.³³

44 [46] All these things plainly agree with natural science. For the latter teaches Ethics and true virtue after we have acquired the knowledge of things and tasted the preëminence of science.

45 Therefore, the happiness and tranquility of one who cultivates his natural understanding—according to Solomon's mind as well—depends in the greatest degree not on the imperium of fortune (that is, on God's external help), but on one's own internal virtue (or God's internal help): namely, since by watching, acting, and consulting well, one preserves oneself to the greatest degree.

46 [47] Finally, never to be passed over here is the passage in Paul which is found° in Romans 1:20, where he says as follows (as Tremellius³⁴ renders it on the basis of the Syriac text): *For from the foundations of the world, the hidden things of God—and his virtue and divinity, which is for eternity—are conspicuous in his creatures through the understanding, so that they are without escape.*

47 [48] In these words, he indicates sufficiently clearly that each understands God's virtue and eternal divinity clearly by the natural light, from which *they*³⁵ can know and deduce what to seek or what to flee; and so he concludes that all are without escape and cannot be excused by ignorance, which in fact they could be if he were speaking of a light above the natural one and the passion and resurrection of the carnal Christ, etc.

48 [49] And therefore a little below, at verse 24,³⁶ he goes on as follows: *On this account, God gave them over to the worldly concupiscences of their hearts, etc.*, down to the end of the chapter: in these words, he describes the vices of ignorance and narrates them as the comeuppances for ignorance, as plainly agrees with that Proverb of Solomon's at 16:22 which we have already cited,³⁷ namely, **ומוסר אויילים אולת**, *And the comeuppance of fools is foolishness.*

49 [50] Therefore, no wonder Paul says that evildoers are inexcusable. For just as each one sows, so he reaps: from evils, evils necessarily follow, unless they are corrected wisely; and from³⁸ good things, good things follow, if steadfastness of spirit accompanies

³² “mezima” properly signifies thought, deliberation, and vigilance.” Spinoza's note.

³³ Prov. 2:10.

³⁴ *Novum Testamentum ex syriaco latinum* (Geneva, 1569), *ad loc.* John Immanuel Tremellius (1510-80), born a Jew in Ferrara, Italy, became a Catholic in 1540, then a Protestant in 1541; he subsequently taught Hebrew at Strasbourg, Cambridge, Heidelberg, and finally Sedan. “Tremellius's greatest work is his translation of the Old and New Testaments into Latin from Hebrew and Syriac respectively. This was long the standard Protestant translation of the Bible. The NT (Syriac text with Latin tr.) appeared in 1569; the OT (Latin tr. only) in 5 parts between 1575 and 1579.” (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross [2nd. ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1974], s.v. “Tremellius, John Immanuel.”) “When Spinoza cites the New Testament in Latin, he most often takes up Tremellius's translation....” (Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 725, n. 30.; Akkerman also notes Spinoza's deviations from Tremellius, *passim*.)

³⁵ This word is implicit in Spinoza's Latin; the reference is to *they* (also implicit in Tremellius's Latin) in the last clause of the biblical verse quoted in 4.4.46.

³⁶ I.e., Rom. 1:24.

³⁷ See 4.4.36. Cf. 2.9.28.

³⁸ Or: on the basis of. (Likewise earlier in 4.4.49.) Cf. Glossary, s.v. “on the basis of.”

4.4.50

them.

50 Accordingly, Scripture absolutely commends the natural divine light and law. And the things I had proposed to deal with in this Chapter,³⁹ I have discharged.

³⁹ See 4.3.7, 4.12-13.